

Discoveries and a rediscovery are features of three of the contributions in this issue of *Oryx*. A major conservation event of 1992 was the discovery of a new species of ox in Vietnam. The ox has now been described and named and an article describes the discovery and all that is currently known of the animal. The Vietnam Ministry of Forestry is to be congratulated on moving so swiftly when the ox was found – cancelling logging in the area and enlarging the Vu Quang Nature Reserve, which is now to become a national park.

The prospects for the new ox appear to be better than for two other recently described species in Brazil. The black-headed marmoset and the Ka'apor capuchin both have restricted distributions in areas of Amazonia that are suffering from high rates of human expansion and habitat degradation.

The rediscovery of the bay cat in Borneo after more than 60 years is good news. The cat was on the point of death when discovered, but at least there is a chance that the species still survives in viable numbers and the acquisition of the first whole specimen gives an opportunity to clarify the taxonomic status of this small and elusive cat.

I am sending this issue to press immediately on my return from a survey of fruit bats in the Maldivian Islands in the Indian Ocean, where I had an opportunity to see a conservation problem at first hand. *Old World Fruit Bats: An Action Plan for their Conservation*, which was compiled by Simon Mickleburgh (an FFPS staff member), Tony Hutson and Paul Racey, contained a list of 20 top priority projects. One of these involved a survey of the Maldives, which has two endemic subspecies of fruit bat – *Pteropus giganteus ariel* and *P. maris hypomelanus* – the only indigenous terrestrial mammals. Fruit bat damage to fruit crops in the islands had been met with culling operations in the 1980s and there was concern that these could cause extinctions in the small and isolated bat populations of the archipelago.

A 12-member team led by Tony Hutson, Co-Chairman of the Chiroptera Specialist Group, set out in November, partly assisted with grants from the FFPS and the International Trust for Nature Conservation. The Maldivian

authorities, also concerned about the effects of culling, provided us with an excellent companion, interpreter and adviser from the Ministry of Agriculture. Wherever we landed the islanders welcomed us with hospitality and courtesy but were clearly less tolerant of the bats. They regarded them only as pests and were prepared to kill them themselves regardless of the government's regular controlled culls. With the small size of the islands and their isolation it was easy to see how uncontrolled killing could result in local extinctions. It was easy, too, to understand the islander's attitudes. There is little agricultural land in the islands and the fast-growing communities are dependent largely on fish and fruit for their livelihoods.

Conflict between humans and wildlife over food resources is a common problem throughout the world and compromise solutions are often possible. Finding such solutions in the particular circumstances of the Maldives will not be easy. The isolation and small size of the islands, the difficulties of monitoring bat populations and deciding on safe levels of culling, the near impossibility of finding non-destructive methods of protecting fruit trees, the lack of conservation personnel and the attitudes of the local people conspire against it.

There are signs of hope, however, on the evening before our departure, a public holiday to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Republic, the Ministry of Agriculture opened its offices to meet us. Such a gesture was encouraging in itself and our discussion was no less so. More work needs to be done to ensure a future for the threatened bats and the Maldivian authorities are keen for it to go ahead. The Government has formed a new Ministry of the Environment, has signed the Biodiversity Convention and has identified three potential nature reserves. Non-governmental conservation organizations are forming and while at present they appear to be concerned with marine turtles, maybe soon they will take up the cause of the bats.

*Jacqui Morris, Editor*

*Old World Fruit Bats: An Action Plan for their Conservation* is available from FFPS for £10 plus postage and packing (£2.50 UK, £5.00 overseas).